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ABSTRACT

The Speech Communication Club at St. Cloud University (Minnesota), begun in 1981, serves as a good example of how nonperformance student organizations lead to student growth and departmental development. Results of a survey which measured the club's effectiveness indicated that students enter the organization with different goals dependent on the stage in their student career. Members report that these goals are being met. The primary responsibility of the advisors at this more mature level of program development appears to be twofold: first, to assist students in becoming more cognizant of the organization as a forum for extending class/textbook learning to their experience in the organization; and second, to assist department faculty in becoming cognizant of the ways in which the organization is assisting the department in achieving its goals. With the strong emphasis in post-secondary education on experiential learning, this nonperformance student organization offers still another channel for working with this concept within the field of speech communication, by drawing students to the observable and the concrete. (One figure is included, and an appendix containing the Communication Club Survey is attached.) (KEH)

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BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: DISCOVERY LEARNING IN A NONPERFORMANCE SPEECH COMMUNICATION CLUB

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Introduction

It has been a long standing belief that student involvement in extra- or co-curricular activities enhances the overall educational experience of the student. Extra-curricular achievement emerged as one of the most important college experiences related to career success throughout a series of studies conducted by AT&T since 1920 (Howard, 1984, p. 1). Students are quoted as saying that involvement helped with job interviews by giving "proof of leadership and organization skills," or that because of experiences in the organization they are able to "better deal with present business relationships," and that the activity helped them develop "confidence and communication skills" (Westphall, 1988, p. 14). Within the tradition of our own discipline of Speech Communication this has been evident in the development of student performance organizations such as Forensics, Readers Theatre, and Speakers' Bureaus to which Communication Departments have given support because of the belief that these organizations offer to students a rich educational experience.

Professional journals in our discipline report numerous studies conducted throughout the years on the development and effectiveness of Forensics and other performance oriented organizations. This emphasis on performance organizations is consistent with the traditional emphasis found in the history of our discipline. However, little is reported in our professional journals on the development and effectiveness of nonperformance student organizations. As the discipline has expanded its educational focus to relationship development, leadership, group, organizational and interpersonal

dynamics, so must the extra-curricular offerings for our students. One such option is a nonperformance organization for majors and minors in speech communication. The Speech Communication Department of St. Cloud State University has successfully developed a nonperformance organization for its majors and minors--The Speech Communication Club. The purpose of this article is to present a model of a successful major/minor organization for those departments currently struggling with the development of a similar organization for their students. This article discusses the value of this nonperformance organization to both the student and the department, describes the developmental model of the Speech Communication Club at St. Cloud State University, and discusses the effectiveness of the organization in meeting the goals of the department.

The Value Of A Nonperformance Organization In Speech Communication

"Many educators contend that education is not confined to books and teachers, students, and classrooms. It is the basic process by which people, individually and collectively learn how to cope with themselves, other people, and other aspects of their environment in ways that are in their own best interests" (Sarbaugh, 1979, p. 11). Students are encouraged to join campus organizations for opportunities to develop leadership skills, to build self confidence, to become integrated into the campus community, to begin to establish a pattern

of involvement for those years beyond college, and to demonstrate to potential employers those "people skills" indicative of a valued employee. Company interviewers seek information on a student's extra-curricular activities out of a belief that this is an indication of the student's ability to "fit" in the organization and to assume responsibility.

These benefits are only a small portion of the overall value of a major/minor organization in the area of speech communication. These can be seen by addressing the value of such an organization at two levels: at the student level and at the department/university/community level.

Value to the Student

Jerome Bruner identifies a concept called "discovery learning" in which students are given access to materials and situations; then they identify consistencies and relationships and extend their learning to new situations (1966, pp. 49-72). A nonperformance organization in speech communication accomplishes this discovery learning for majors and minors by allowing for social networking, leadership development, and personal enrichment. Each of these areas suggests values of the nonperformance organization to the student.

Students first learn networking skills in a nonthreatening peer-to-peer environment. They learn to provide support for one another as they plan social events, engage in fundraising activities, and work with other student organizations across campus to sponsor speakers and tours. Networking extends beyond peer contacts to involvement with faculty. Club members develop a sense of belonging to the department and strengthen communication with persons at a different hierarchical level as they gather materials for the student newsletter, co-direct the annual orientation session for majors, and provide occasional service for the department. The need to secure guest speakers, maintain alumni contacts, and to find sponsors for philanthropic endeavors widens club members' networking into the community and beyond. Students begin to feel comfortable in making contacts and initiating communication with those beyond their circle of peers.

The club offers a rich opportunity for the development of leadership skills. An executive board forms the core of leadership with a president, vice president, secretary, trèasurer, and historian serving year-long terms. In addition, co-chairs of seven committees are elected on a quarter-by-quarter basis giving a larger number of students not only an opportunity to serve in a leadership function, but also to try their hand at a position matching vocational interests. Committees include Public Relations, Social Activities, Speakers and Tours, Alumni-Membership, Fundraising, Community Outreach, and Student Newsletter. In addition, during appropriate quarters, co-chairs are elected for Homecoming and Spring Banquet planning. One individual is elected as club representative to the

university council of organizations. More than a popularity vote, students effectively evaluate nominees on the basis of qualifications and leadership potential. As leaders, students learn the difficulty of motivating the general membership, the need for goal-setting and time management, organizational communication, decision-making approaches, and other skills. Many of the graduating seniors point to their leadership in the club as having provided excellent vocational training and personal development. Students establish a pattern of community involvement and awareness which will potentially transfer beyond the college years.

Beyond this, the nonperformance organization in speech communication also provides personal enrichment for all students. The club allows students to excel in a nonperformance arena. Not all speech communication majors or minors find enjoyment in performance activities, but they are nevertheless very involved in their discipline. An organization such as this allows students to connect with their discipline in an enjoyable, nonthreatening, non-academic sense. Students learn a practical and non-theoretical side of speech communication through exposure to speakers, discussion of career opportunities, tours of organizations, and even through the management of the club itself. In all they do, club members have an opportunity to put into immediate practice what is taught in public speaking, interpersonal, small group, and organizational classes.

An additional value of the nonperformance organization in speech communication is found in helping students refine communication skills and recognize and utilize various functions of communication in

problem-solving. "The primary criterion . . . for evaluating students' grasp of communication functions is how well they are able to identify the functions in working out solutions to communication problems (Sarbaugh, 1979, p. 146)." Through day-to-day work within the organization, students learn how to express feelings, exchange information, and share leisure. They learn the value of reinforcement as they work and build together. There is a satisfaction of achievement felt in working with others, and they learn how to influence action in order to ensure the growth and development of the organization.

Value to the Department, University, Community

When a Communication Department allocates resources to a major/minor organization, the investment has a potential for reaching far beyond student enrichment to benefits felt by both the department and the university community. Active membership in the organization helps to develop cohesion among the students of the department. Activities of the organization, when supported by and involving the faculty, promote student/faculty contact, potentially enhancing student/faculty relations. The organization offers an outlet for disseminating departmental information, and provides a channel for student input to the department. Information on internships, professional associations, new courses, scholarships, and competitive academic recognition is regularly communicated to club members. The club becomes a defined body of students to whom the department can offer information on career preparation seminars, graduate program information, and occasional job opportunities. The department depends

on club members to provide input to them on departmental activities like Communication Week, and to provide feedback on classroom effectiveness of teaching candidates during the search process. Since the focus of the organization is to enhance both the student and the department, the club often provides service to the department through activities such as new student phon-a-thons, organization of an annual orientation meeting for majors and minors, and representation at university and community functions. The student organization also offers a structure for recognizing faculty through activities such as Faculty Appreciation Week, Secret Santas, and nominations for Outstanding Teacher Awards.

A successful major/minor club will enhance promotion of the department and major to both the university and the community. Through membership drives, university-wide fund raisers, club sponsored speakers open to (and promoted to) the campus, and club representation at university functions, the student body and administration are made aware of the major and the department from a positive, action-oriented perspective. Cooperative ventures with other organizations on campus also increase visibility and understanding of the program.

Through the activities of the organization, the department's (as well as university's) relationship with the community is also enhanced, helping to better inform potential community supporters about the major and developing positive attitudes toward our graduates. Through requesting community persons to speak, participating in career days, and arranging events which involve the

community such as tours, raffles and community service activities, key persons in the community are given an opportunity to observe the communication skills of these students and to discuss the program and its offerings. Through club associations, some of the students have been successful in developing contacts for internships or employment. Both the community and the department are made better aware of the resources each has to offer the other. Because of the focus of the organization, it is a natural development for its members to be interested in, and to seek contact with, past graduates of the department. Therefore, a stronger alumni network can be developed for the department through this aspect of the organization.

With the wealth of benefits described above, it is difficult to see why any department would not welcome and actively support a nonperformance major/minor club. These benefits are those which the students and department are presently reaping at St. Cloud State University, after an initial struggle and through continual organizational development. It is important to note that a successful program takes time and commitment by both faculty and students to ensure success. Outlining the developmental stages of St. Cloud State University's Speech Communication Club may prove to be helpful to those departments currently grappling with similar organizations, or wishing to initiate the development of a nonperformance student organization.

Establishing the Speech Communication Club: Three Phases of Growth

The Speech Communication Club at St. Cloud State University has grown steadily since its inception in 1981. Today it boasts an average of over sixty active members, or approximately 12-15% of our majors. The development of the club will be discussed as it progressed from (1) a felt need, through a period of (2) growth and development, up to the present, or (3) stabilization.

Felt Need

In the spring of 1981, a select group of faculty and students felt a need for a vehicle that would enhance camaraderie and open communication channels between the students and a growing department. It was the philosophy of the department that this be a nonperformance organization since we already had a forensics team and an interpretation organization in place. We also felt that the faculty could aid in establishing the club, but that they should not be responsible for the club's ultimate success. We volunteered to act as faculty advisors in spearheading efforts to establish such an organization. An ad hoc committee of ten students met with the faculty advisors and formulated goals for the club. It was felt that the club should serve both educational and career goals along with providing for a social outlet for majors and minors. A basic club structure was formulated which included the executive board and four committees. In essence, the ad hoc committee became the officers, so

there was no need for a dual-meeting structure with executive planning and a general membership meeting. Everything was accomplished through meeting of the whole. During the first summer, students met and planned club activities for the upcoming school year. When student excitement for the club continued into the fall of the following year, it was believed that a felt need might be met by this organization.

Growth and Development, 1982-86

Advising has remained constant over much of the life of the organization, so identification of this four-year stage of development seems accurate. This was not an easy time for the club, but it was an exciting one. The first major change in structure occurred during the winter of 1983 when club members adopted a quarter-by-quarter co-chair system for Public Relations, Social, Fundraising, and Speaker/Alumni/Tours. Despite initial advisor reluctance to embrace this model due to limited membership, it has proved successful. In the spring of the following year, the club ratified its first constitution and by-laws.

The nature of advising during this time period was more directive. This was consistent with Hersey and Blanchard's model for an immature (i.e., young and inexperienced) group (Hersey and Blanchard, 1982). We encouraged the use of the executive board in planning, helped with long-range goal setting, assisted in constitution refinement, and groomed potential club presidential candidates. A good deal of trial-and-error learning took place during this time period, and advisors allowed club members to experience

problems and learn from them. Information-gathering for major events like banquets lacked sophistication. Fundraising efforts showed a lack of confidence and willingness to take risks. Frequently, rhetoric centered upon the fact of being a "new organization" or a "small group."

As the club neared the end of this phase, more risks were taken. Actions taken were not flawless, and students sometimes reflected back on the "candy bar sale fiasco" or the "newsletter that failed" or other such attempts. But, talk turned to image-building and recruitment. The club recognized that Alumni-Membership should be a separate committee from Speakers-Tours, and the club worked hard to increase its size and visibility on campus. For the first time, they invited the two student performance organizations (Forensics and Performance of Literature) in the department to help them host a major spring banquet which has become an important departmental social and recognition event.

Stabilization, 1986 to Present

During this phase, rhetoric shifted from what "could be done" to what "would be done". As the group became more mature and confident, advising shifted to a participative and delegating style (Hersey and Blanchard, 1982). The club started to become more accountable for actions of its leaders and its membership. Record keeping and procedures have become more formalized with report sheets, and the

constitution has been expanded and refined. Individuals were removed from positions and censured for unacceptable performance. Leaders reminded members that their behavior reflected on the entire reputation of the club.

One of the most exciting things to see happen was a horizontal development of the club structure. A need was seen for a student newsletter to go out bi-monthly to all majors and minors. Co-editors were sought for this position. Instead of being satisfied with merely electing a king and a queen candidate in the fall, Homecoming co-chairs now coordinate float building and candidate support. Banquet co-chairs begin six months in advance to organize the large, formal departmental banquet and recognition ceremony. This last year, the club has provided a nice balance to its functions by establishing Community Outreach co-chairs who have secured donations for large swimming and pizza parties for Big Brothers and Big Sisters, engaged in philanthropic fundraising, and given time to the local senior citizens' center.

During this time period, the club has stabilized its image and its place in the campus community. Members of other business organizations on campus now hold membership in the Speech Communication Club, and have a double major with communication or are interdepartmental majors* in our department. Regular fundraising

* This major designation is a 72-credit program with 40 credits of speech communication courses and 32 credits of a supporting program in such areas as marketing, management, public relations, human relations, etc.

and social activities promote our club. What is especially important is that during these past several years of phenomenal university growth (averaging over 10% annually) and departmental growth, we have managed to maintain good contact with a strong core of our majors. We believe we have found the right vehicle for promoting the camaraderie and open communication we felt a need for in 1981.

One should not be too hasty to assess effectiveness of departmental organization such as this. Had we assessed the value of the club during its growth and development phase, we might have questioned the allocation of faculty resources and support. Yet, at this time, the club is healthy and growing.

The club meets weekly during the day at a time in our schedule when classes are not in session. Students try to keep the hour free in their own course scheduling. The executive board (officers and committee heads) also meet weekly to engage in planning. The club is not credit-generating as contrasted with our performance activities for which credit can be earned. Funding is through membership dues and fundraising efforts, and we are not required to report funds to the university. We continue with club-selected co-advisors on a newly-adopted rotating two-year term. Advisors are responsible for a yearly report to the department and informal contacts with the executive board. Departmental support is given in co-advising; providing student organization office space and meeting space; allowing for limited secretarial assistance, supplies, and mailing; securing bulletin board space exclusively for club use; and, in funding for the printing of a club brochure.

Recently, we have recognized the value of formally assessing effectiveness of the club in meeting goals from both student and faculty perspectives. A survey was designed not only to serve as a measure of effectiveness, but to also provide input to the club from its membership and faculty, and as a valuable tool in terms of targeting areas to strengthen. Data from this assessment is included in this article.

Effectiveness of the Speech Communication Club

In order to measure the effectiveness of the Speech Communication Club, a survey was administered to active members (Appendix A). Demographic data on gender, age, major/minor status, and departmental extra curricular activity involvement was gathered along with information on when students first joined, how they learned about the organization, and reasons why they joined. The focal point of the survey measured member attitudes on club effectiveness in meeting what the advisors and officers believed were goals or objectives of the organization.

The typical Speech Communication Club member is female, age 21 or older, a declared interdepartmental major, and is not involved in either of the two performance-oriented departmental extra curricular activities. Most of the members join during their junior year, although many join as seniors. Generally, this occurs in conjunction with official major declaration. Word-of-mouth advertising by peers

in class and through club posters along with friend membership seem to be the most influential factors in acquainting students with the Speech Communication Club.

It is interesting, although not surprising, to discover that sophomore-, junior-, and senior-level students join with different personal goals in mind. The primary reason sophomores (who are ambitious in setting up major programs but few in number) join is to get acquainted with other majors. A secondary reason for them joining is to learn more about the department and major. This, however, is the primary reason juniors cite for joining the Speech Communication Club. A secondary reason for juniors is to learn more about career opportunities in speech communication. Seniors cite career interests as their primary reason for joining, and they also cite their desire to develop leadership skills through club involvement. There is a very clear continuum of motivation which can be useful for both targeting membership and providing for the needs of the sophomore-, junior-, and senior-level major (see Fig. 1).

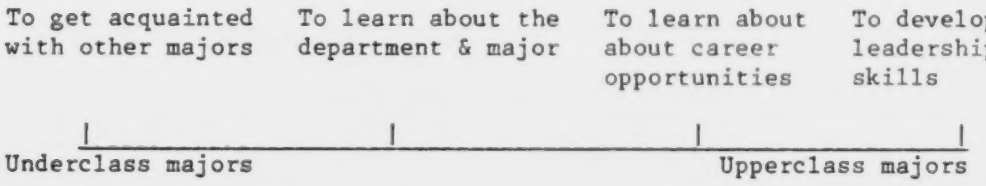
To get acquainted with other majors
To learn about the department & major
To learn about about career opportunities
To develop leadership skills
Underclass majors
Upperclass majors

Fig. 1: Personal Goals for Joining Speech Communication Club

The survey of our membership was very encouraging in terms of assessing effectiveness of the Speech Communication Club in 17 areas. Students were asked to indicate whether goals (i.e., "developing contacts among majors and minors," "promoting student-faculty contact") were "very effective," "effective," "so-so," or "ineffective". Seventy-five percent of the membership polled ranked the following goals as very effectively or effectively met by the club. Listed in rank order, these include:

1- Developing contacts among majors and minors
   Disseminating department information
   Providing recognition of faculty
2- Promoting student-faculty contact
3- Providing comradeship among students
   Providing recognition of fellow students
   Providing links to the community
4- Promoting the major program
5- Providing career information
   Providing campus-wide exposure for department and program

Sixty-six percent of the membership polled ranked the following goals as very effectively or effectively met by the club. Listed in rank order, these include:

6- Developing interdepartmental collegiality among students
7- Providing student input to the department
   Providing service to the department
8- Developing student leadership skills

The areas in which membership felt we were only average in effectiveness included maintaining contacts with alumni, providing opportunities to apply concepts and skills learned in classes, and providing graduate program information. Although we do have an alumni-membership subcommittee, work on developing and maintaining membership, which is currently 60 members, overshadows alumni contact. Efforts in this regard are not communicated as directly to

the membership, and alumni may not be used as effectively as possible. In terms of classroom application, students--especially officers--may not be aware of interpersonal, small group process, organizational behavior, or presentation skills that are used in club operations. However, advisors notice student growth in these areas. More could be done to help students see these connections. Graduate program information is not disseminated through the club since such a small percentage of our students opt for graduate school, and those who do tend to seek advice from the faculty member in charge of that function.

Faculty in the department were also polled as to Speech Communication Club's effectiveness. While most faculty opinion parallels results from the student survey, we discovered that many were unaware of specific ways in which objectives were being met. This points to a need for regular communication from the club officers and advisors to the faculty as a whole.

Conclusion

When the Speech Communication Club at St. Cloud State University was first organized in 1981, it was a pioneering effort with no models for guiding its development or focus. Since that time, the organization's advisors have observed the impact the organization has had on students, the department, and the community. It has become evident that this nonperformance student organization is a vehicle for student growth and departmental development--a vehicle not yet having met its full potential. Survey results indicate that students are entering the organization with different goals dependent on the stage in their student career. Members report that these goals are being met. The primary responsibility of the advisors at this more mature level of program development appears to be twofold: first, to assist students in becoming more cognizant of the organization as a forum for extending class/textbook learning to their experience in the organization; and second, to assist department faculty in becoming cognizant of the ways in which the organization is assisting the department in achieving its goals.

With the strong emphasis in post-secondary education on experiential learning, the nonperformance student organization in speech communication offers still another channel for working with this concept within our discipline. According to learning theorists the majority of liberal arts students are "sensing learners," drawn to the observable, the concrete (Hesser, 1987, p. 14). The nonperformance organization offers an opportunity for this type of learning. This article has discussed the value of a nonperformance

organization to both the student and the department, described a developmental model of such an organization, and discussed its effectiveness in meeting student and departmental goals. Progressive programs in speech communication will offer an opportunity for their students to develop a nonperformance organization. More studies of successful models need to be reported in our professional journals, and quantitative as well as qualitative data should be collected to demonstrate the impact of these organizations on students and programs.

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Appendix A

COMMUNICATION CLUB SURVEY
Please respond to all questions

1. Gender: Male Female

2. Age: _____

3. Major/Minor Status

___ declared (filed)

___ undeclared (interested)

___ Interdepartmental Major
___ 48 Credit Speech Comm. Major
___ 36 Credit Speech Comm. Major
___ Speech Comm. Minor
___ Teaching Major/Minor Speech Comm.
___ None of the above

4. In what departmental activities are you currently involved?

___ Speech Communication Club
___ PLA'yers
___ Forensics

5. When did you first join Speech Communication Club?

___ Freshman
___ Sophomore
___ Junior
___ Senior

6. How did you learn about Speech Communication Club?

___ class announcement
___ advisor
___ friends
___ membership drive
___ communication club publicity
___ other _____

7. Why did you join Speech Communication Club?
(rank order: 1 most important to 5 least important)

___ to get acquainted with other majors
___ to develop leadership skills
___ to learn more about the department and major
___ to learn more about career opportunities
___ other

8. How effective is the Speech Communication Club in the following areas: (check one designation for each area)

	Very Effective	Effective	"So So"	Ineffective	Comments
a. Developing contacts among majors/minors					
b. Promoting student/faculty contact					
c. Providing comradeship among students					
d. Developing student leadership skills					
e. Disseminating department information					
f. Providing student input to department					
g. Providing recognition of faculty					
h. Providing recognition of fellow students					
i. Providing career information					
j. Providing graduate program information					
k. Providing service to department					
l. Providing opportunities to apply concepts/skills learned in classes					
m. Promoting the major program					
n. Providing campus wide exposure for department and program					
o. Developing interdepartmental collegiality among students					
p. Providing links to community					
q. Maintaining contacts with alumni					

9. In what way could Speech Communication Club better meet your needs?

_____

_____

_____

_____